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Across the nation, from the smallest towns to the largest cities, the quality of virtually every community is defined by the strength of its public schools. While the most important “stakeholders” in these schools are students and their parents, local employers and other businesses have a vested interest in the success of schools as well. Challenged by budget shortfalls in the face of efforts to have all students meet high standards, and recognizing the link between good schools, student achievement and a prosperous economy, schools and businesses are now more ambitious and creative than ever before in their efforts to work together.

1. Why did William J. Palmer High School choose to initiate partnerships with businesses in Colorado?

William J. Palmer High School is located in middle of downtown Colorado Springs. The school was facing a multitude of problems including declining enrollment, poor image in the community, high dropout rates, a failure rate of 49% in the ninth grade, dated facilities, high numbers of discipline referrals and suspensions, and a lack programs that demonstrated a clear relationship to future career opportunities. If you purchased a home in the Palmer High School attendance area it was not uncommon for realtors to share with potential buyers information about how they could get a permit to attend a school other than Palmer. Virtually every store in the downtown area had a sign in the window stating, “No more than two Palmer students allowed in store at one time.”

In addition to the above challenges, the school district had not been successful in passing a bond issue in support of public schools for more than 25 years. The school district and William J. Palmer High School were facing touch financial times resulting in the elimination of programs and lack of resources to provide the best possible educational opportunities for student. During this same time period the downtown business community was also experiencing an economic slump. Business was slow and many stores were closing. People did not go downtown for shopping or dining.

In light of these problems, the staff members, students, parents, alumni and the business community (especially the downtown businesses) were committed to supporting the school and providing resources that had a positive impact on student achievement. We felt the school was a part of the downtown community and the

community was also a part of the school. Working together we saw many positive changes take place in the school and in the downtown business community. In fact there was an article in the *Denver Post* describing the truly symbiotic relationship between Palmer High School and the downtown businesses and highlighted the unique role the school played in the renaissance of the downtown area as well as the impact the business community had on the many positive changes in the school. School/business partnerships were indeed a key element school's transformation. As a direct result of support from the many business partners, the school was able to keep programs in place that had a positive impact on student achievement.

2. How did your partners contribute to education, and math and science achievement in particular? What were the benefits of this involvement in education for your school, your teachers and your students? Did these partnerships have broader community impacts?

Partners Contribution to Education

As principal at William J. Palmer High School, both my staff and I initiated partnerships with Colorado College, the University of Colorado, Pikes Peak Community College, non-profit organizations and Colorado Springs business entities resulting in strong community support for educational and extra-curricular activities. More than 100 businesses and/or organizations were in place as partners with the school. A unique aspect of the school's involvement with the local business community was working with the Board of Directors of Downtown Colorado Springs, Inc., a consortium of Colorado Springs businesses that were committed to improving the downtown environment. Partnership involvement included mentor programs, internships, guest speakers, tutors, senior volunteers, motivational/incentive programs and financial support for the school's programs. Textbooks, equipment, supplies, on-site professional development for staff, resources to send staff and students to conferences and workshops, support for extra-curricular activities and programs for at-risk students are just a few of the benefits realized from partnership relationships.

Partnerships directly related to math and science achievement involved companies and organizations such as Hewlett Packard, Texas Instruments, The American Cancer Society, Memorial Hospital, Penrose Hospital, the Pikes Peak Medical Society, The American Red Cross, Richard Lightle Architects, Colorado Springs Utilities, Six Flags, Colorado Interstate Gas, the Colorado Springs Automobile Dealers Association, The Coca-Cola Company and the U.S. Forest Service. In addition to the partnership benefits mentioned above science/math/engineering related contributions included partnering with companies on science fair projects, donations of lab equipment that exceeded what the school could afford to buy, support for students to attend national and international science fair competitions, use of sophisticated lab equipment for experiments (i.e. electron microscope, x-ray machine, gas chromatographs), and opportunities for both students and teachers to attend seminars/workshops and science related topics held at local companies and colleges/universities.

Benefits for School, Teachers and Students

School/business partnerships do not guarantee success. Partnerships do however provide additional resources that support teachers in doing what they do best. As Senator Lamar Alexander stated, "Partnerships between business and schools can significantly enhance the quality of education we are able to provide." Statistics show that successful school/business partnerships can:

- Promote improved student achievement
- Reduce self-defeating behaviors amongst students
- Create better school environments
- Build stronger communities
- Enhance property values

School/Business partnerships do help support programs that positively impact student achievement.

As documented in the accompanying graphs covering a five-year period, the overall benefits for Palmer High School were significant. Instead of a declining enrollment, the school grew from 1,080 students to 2,017. The dropout rate decreased (14.6% to 5% for Hispanic students, 12.9% to 3.9% for Black students), the number of discipline referrals decreased from 3,157 to 855, the number of suspensions decreased from 699 to 122, and the number of students on the honor roll (3.25 GPA or higher) increased from 29.8% to 45.6%.

Teachers felt more appreciated for their efforts. Having additional resources available to them for programs that helped students was a plus. The business community becoming more involved in our school as well as our school becoming more involved in the community fostered a positive atmosphere that carried over beyond the classroom walls. Teachers were energized by the community support for their educational endeavors with students.

Students likewise appreciated the business involvement. They felt that people cared about them as individuals. Feeling embraced by the community impacted their behavior and their academic achievement. The entire atmosphere of the school and the downtown community began to change. Within a year all of the signs limiting the number of Palmer students allowed in a store came down.

Specifically related to science and math achievement, Palmer High School dominated local, regional and state science fair and math competitions, sending several students to national and international events. The school's test scores were consistently among the highest of any public or private school in southern Colorado and the amount of scholarship dollars for students going on to college increased significantly.

Broader Community Impact

Across the nation, the quality of virtually every community is defined by the strength of its public schools. As mentioned earlier in this document, the impact of partnerships on the local community was noteworthy. The downtown business

community began to flourish and the overall atmosphere changed for the better. The community's image of Palmer students and the school changed for the better. Students were now welcomed into business establishments.

Not only did the environment improve but the Board of Realtors reported the largest increase in property values for the Colorado Springs region was the attendance area served by Palmer High School. Not only were the partnerships good for the school, they were also good for business and property owners. Better schools do contribute to the economic health of a community.

**3. What are the hallmarks of a successful partnership?
between schools and businesses? How do you measure
that success? And how are those successes shared with
other schools and businesses?**

Hallmarks of Successful Partnerships

The Council of Corporate and School Partnerships conducted research with the National Association of Partners in Education to gather data from the field. Seeking out individuals currently engaged in business and school partnerships, more than 300 school administrators were interviewed, as well as business executives at more than 50 companies. These individuals helped identify what worked for them, what was important to them, and challenges they faced.

The Council then translated the findings into four themes and then ultimately into the eight Guiding Principles for School and Business Partnerships. Using the research data, the *Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships* were developed to help partners work together. A copy of the *Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships* booklet is provided for the members of the committee.

The *Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships* are designed to help educators and business leaders face educational challenges by developing relationships that support mutual goals, and offer long-term, sustainable benefits for students and schools. Recognizing that the needs and interests of various businesses are as widely diverse as the needs of small, large, urban, suburban and rural schools and school systems, the Guiding Principles were developed to be a framework for structuring partnerships, as opposed to a prescription for partnership particulars.

The eight guiding principles are:

- 1) School-Business partnerships must be built on shared values and philosophies.
- 2) Partnerships should be defined by mutually beneficial goals and objectives.
- 3) Partnership activities should be integrated into the school and business cultures.

- 4) Partnerships should be driven by a clear management process and structure.
- 5) Partnerships should define specific, measurable outcomes.
- 6) Partnerships should have support at the highest level within the business and school and concurrence at all levels.
- 7) Partnerships should include internal and external communication plans, which clearly illustrate expectations of all parties.
- 8) Partnerships should be developed with clear definitions of success for all parties.

Measures of Success

The success of a partnership can be evaluated in a multitude of ways. The goals and the objectives developed as part of the partnership process should be the focus of assessment. Partnerships should be guided by a collaborative agreement on outcomes, benchmarks and measures of progress. The partners should communicate regularly about the intended and actual outcomes of all partnership activities. There is already data collected at the school and/or district level for state and national accountability needs. Use of this information whenever possible eliminates the need to duplicate efforts. Also data used for tracking student attendance and discipline referrals can be used. There are other partnerships assessment tools available on the Council for Corporate and School Partnerships website at www.corpschoolpartners.org and the National Association of Secondary School Principals website www.principals.org. A Self-Assessment Tool for Partnership Improvement is also included in the *How-To Guide for School-Business Partnerships* developed by the Council for Corporate and School Partnerships.

Sharing Partnership Success Stories

Schools and businesses must be proactive in sharing their successes relative to school-business partnerships. It is important that superintendents, principals, school board, CEO's and managers share partnerships successes both internally and externally on a regular basis. Allow opportunities for private and public recognition of partnership success. Share the good news!

Sharing Successes With Other School and Businesses

Workshops and/or presentations for school and business leaders are one way to share information about what works and what doesn't work relative to school/business partnerships. Equally important is sharing information about successful partnerships and providing schools and businesses with the tools to help them establish true partnerships - relationships that build upon shared understanding of the values that support mutual needs.

Sharing the *Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships* and the *How-To Guide for School-Business Partnerships* with educational and business leaders can

serve as a foundation upon which to build relationships that support mutual goals and offer long-term, sustainable benefits for students, schools and communities. Through the development of school-business partnerships, communities would see added value to their school environment and ultimately additional support for the educational mission of the school.

4. How can we encourage more businesses and their employees to partner successfully with struggling schools? How would a national recognition and information dissemination program, as envisioned by H.R. XXXX, help?

Encourage Partnering With Struggling Schools

Recent research conducted by the National Association of Partners in Education in conjunction with the Search Institute shows a positive relationship between student involvement in partnerships activities and success in school. Not only does the research show a trend toward improved achievement, but also a reduction in “Risk Behaviors” such as alcohol use and discipline problems at school. An increase in “Thriving Outcomes” was also noted in behaviors related to health habits, valuing diversity and demonstrating leadership. The data from Palmer High School mirrors the results of the Search Institute.

Improved student achievement, reduction in self-defeating behaviors and an increase in positive outcomes should be incentive for increased business involvement. Ultimately, the bottom line is the better educated and prepared students are the better it is for businesses and our country. Working together we can achieve the extraordinary!

National Recognition Program

As mentioned earlier, sharing information about successful partnerships helps other schools and businesses see the positive impact of school/business partnerships. Recognition programs do help get the word out to others and gives schools and/or businesses potential models and/or contacts to use in setting up their own partnership programs.